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MAUDE

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MAUDE

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

WILLIAM MICHAEL ROSSETTI

91639

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LONDON

JAMES BOWDEN

10 HENRIETTA STREET

COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

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Thanks are due to Messrs Macmillan & Co. for permission to include the three bouts-rimés *which are now their copyright; also to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for allowing the sonnet "What is it Jesus saith unto the soul?" (since included in* Verses, *published in 1893) to appear in the volume. The remaining poems are now printed for the first time.*

PREFATORY NOTE

This "Tale for Girls" (as I should be disposed to call it) was written out by Christina Rossetti, with her usually excessive neatness of calligraphy, in 1850. *I suppose it may have been composed in that year, or a year or two earlier. In* 1850, *up to 5th December, she was nineteen years of age. The poems that occur in "Maude" were written without any intention of inserting them in any tale—except only the first two in the trio of* bouts-rimés *sonnets. The MS. of the tale presents a few slight revisions made at some much later date—perhaps about* 1870 *or* 1875.

I daresay that Christina may towards 1850 *have offered the tale here or there for publication, but I*

have no particular recollection as to that point. In now at last publishing it, I am not under any misapprehension regarding the degree of merit which it possesses; I allow it to be in all senses a juvenile performance; but I think it is agreeably written, and not without touches of feminine perception and discernment. The literary reputation of Christina Rossetti is now sufficiently established to make what she wrote interesting to many persons—if not for the writing's own sake, then for the writer's. As such, I feel no qualms in giving publicity to "Maude."

It appears to me that my sister's main object in delineating Maude was to exhibit what she regarded as defects in her own character, and in her attitude towards her social circle and her religious obligations. Maude's constantly weak health is also susceptible to a personal reference, no doubt

intentional: even so minor a point as her designing the pattern of a sofa-pillow might apply to Christina herself. Maude is made the subject of many unfavourable comments, from herself and from her strict-minded authoress. The worst harm she appears to have done is that, when she had written a good poem she felt it to be good. She was also guilty of the grave sin of preferring to forego the receiving of the Eucharist when she supposed herself to be unworthy of it; and further, of attending the musical services at St Andrew's Church (Wells Street, Oxford Street) instead of invariably frequenting her parish church. If some readers opine that all this shows Christina Rossetti's mind to have been at that date overburdened with conscientious scruples, of an extreme and even a wire-drawn kind, I share their opinion. One can trace in this tale that she was already

an adherent of the advanced High Church Party in the Anglican Communion, including Conventional Sisterhoods. So far as my own views of right and wrong go, I cannot see that the much-reprehended Maude commits a single serious fault from title-page to finis.

I fancy that Agnes and Mary Clifton may be, to some extent, limned from two young ladies Alicia and Priscilla Townsend, whom my sister knew and liked in those years. The whole family emigrated—perhaps a year or two prior to 1850—*to Canterbury Settlement, New Zealand. Some surnames introduced into the tale—such as Hunt, Deverell, and Potter—were highly familiar in our household. Towards the close is a sentence —"The locked book she never opened, but had it placed in Maude's coffin": which is curious, as an unconscious prefigurement of a well-known and*

much-discussed incident in the life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

With these few remarks I commit "Maude" to the reader. For its prose the "indulgent reader" (as our great-grandfathers used to phrase it) may be in requisition: for its verse the "discreet reader" will suffice.

W. M. ROSSETTI.

London,
November 1896.

PART FIRST

MAUDE

I

"A PENNY for your thoughts," said Mrs Foster one bright July morning as she entered the sitting-room with a bunch of roses in her hand, and an open letter: "A penny for your thoughts," said she, addressing her daughter, who, surrounded by a chaos of stationery, was slipping out of sight some scrawled paper. This observation remaining unanswered, the mother, only too much accustomed to inattention, continued: "Here is a note from your Aunt Letty; she wants us to go and pass a few days with them. You know Tuesday is Mary's birthday, so they mean to

have some young people and cannot dispense with your company."

"Do you think of going?" said Maude at last, having locked her writing-book.

"Yes, dear: even a short stay in the country may do you good, you have looked so pale lately. Don't you feel quite well? Tell me."

"Oh yes; there is not much the matter, only I am tired and have a headache. Indeed, there is nothing at all the matter; besides, the country may work wonders."

Half-satisfied, half-uneasy, Mrs Foster asked a few more questions, to have them all answered in the same style; vain questions, put to one who, without telling lies, was determined not to tell the truth.

When once more alone, Maude resumed the occupations which her mother's entrance had interrupted. Her writing-book was

neither commonplace-book, album, scrap-book, nor diary; it was a compound of all these, and contained original compositions not intended for the public eye, pet extracts, extraordinary little sketches, and occasional tracts of journal. This choice collection she now proceeded to enrich with the following sonnet:—

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:
But it is harder to bear hated life;
To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;
To drag the heavy chain whose every link
Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink
Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife
With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife
Nor strike home: this is courage as I think.
Surely to suffer is more than to do:

To do is quickly done; to suffer is
Longer and fuller of heart-sicknesses:
Each day's experience testifies of this:
Good deeds are many, but good lives are few;
Thousands taste the full cup; who drains the lees?

having done which she yawned, leaned back in her chair, and wondered how she should fill up the time till dinner.

Maude Foster was just fifteen. Small though not positively short, she might easily be overlooked but would not easily be forgotten. Her figure was slight and well-made, but appeared almost high-shouldered through a habitual shrugging stoop. Her features were regular and pleasing; as a child she had been very pretty; and might have continued so but for a fixed paleness, and an expression, not exactly of pain, but languid and pre-occupied to a

painful degree. Yet even now, if at any time she became thoroughly aroused and interested, her sleepy eyes would light up with wonderful brilliancy, her cheeks glow with warm colour, her manner become animated, and drawing herself up to her full height she would look more beautiful than ever she did as a child. So Mrs Foster said, and so unhappily Maude knew. She also knew that people thought her clever, and that her little copies of verses were handed about and admired. Touching these same verses, it was the amazement of everyone what could make her poetry so broken-hearted as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote very foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret source of uneasiness; while some simply set her down

as affected. Perhaps there was a degree of truth in all these opinions. But I have said enough; the following pages will enable my readers to form their own estimate of Maude's character.

Meanwhile let me transport them to another sitting-room; but this time it will be in the country with a delightful garden look-out.

Mary Clifton was arranging her mother's special nosegay when that lady entered.

"Here, my dear, I will finish doing the flowers. It is time for you to go to meet your aunt and cousin; indeed, if you do not make haste, you will be too late."

"Thank you, mamma; the flowers are nearly done;" and Mary ran out of the room.

Before long she and her sister were hurrying beneath a burning sun towards the railway station.

Through having delayed their start to the very last moment, neither had found time to lay hands on a parasol; but this was little heeded by two healthy girls, full of life and spirits, and longing, moreover, to spy out their friends. Mary wanted one day of fifteen; Agnes was almost a year older: both were well-grown and well-made, with fair hair, blue eyes, and fresh complexions. So far they were alike: what differences existed in other respects remain to be seen.

"How do you do, aunt? How do you do, Maude?" cried Mary, making a sudden dart forward as she discovered our friends, who, having left the station, had already made some progress along the dusty road. Then relinquishing her aunt to Agnes, she seized upon her cousin, and was soon deep in the description of all

the pleasures planned for the auspicious morrow.

"We are to do what we like in the morning: I mean, nothing particular is arranged; so I shall initiate you into all the mysteries of the place; all the cats, dogs, rabbits, pigeons, etc.; above all, I must introduce you to a pig, a special *protégé* of mine: that is, if you are inclined, for you look wretchedly pale; aren't you well, dear?"

"Oh yes, quite well, and you must show me everything. But what are we to do afterwards?"

"Oh! afterwards we are to be intensely grand. All our young friends are coming, and we are to play at round games (you were always clever at round games), and I expect to have great fun. Besides, I have stipulated for unlimited strawberries and cream;

also sundry tarts are in course of preparation. By the way, I count on your introducing some new game among us benighted rustics; you who come from dissipated London."

"I fear I know nothing new, but will do my best. At any rate, I can preside at your toilet, and assist in making you irresistible."

Mary coloured and laughed; then thought no more of the pretty speech, which sounded as if carefully prepared by her polite cousin. The two made a strong contrast: one was occupied by a thousand shifting thoughts of herself, her friends, her plans, what she must do, and what she would do; the other, whatever might employ her tongue, and to a certain extent her mind, had always an undercurrent of thought intent upon herself.

Arrived at the house, greetings were duly and cordially performed; also an introduction to a new and very fat baby, who received Maude's advances with a howl of intense dismay. The first day of a visit is often no very lively affair: so perhaps all parties heard the clock announce bed-time without much regret.

II

THE young people were assembled in Mary's room, deep in the mysteries of the toilet.

"Here is your wreath, Maude; you must wear it for my sake, and forgive a surreptitious sprig of bay which I have introduced," said Agnes, adjusting the last white rose, and looking affectionately at her sister and cousin.

Maude was arranging Mary's long fair hair with good-natured anxiety to display it to the utmost advantage.

"One more spray of fuchsia; I was always sure fuchsia would make a beautiful head-dress. There, now you are perfection; only look; look Agnes. Oh, I beg your pardon; thank you; my wreath is very nice, only I have

not earned the bay." Still she did not remove it; and when placed on her dark hair it well became the really intellectual character of her face. Her dress was entirely white; simple, fresh, and elegant. Neither she nor Agnes would wear ornaments, but left them to Mary, in whose honour the entertainment was given, and who in all other respects was arrayed like her sister.

In the drawing-room Mary proceeded to set in order the presents received that morning—a handsomely bound Bible from her father, and a small prayer-book with cross and clasp from her mother; a bracelet of Maude's hair from her aunt; a cornelian heart from Agnes; and a pocket *bonbonnière* from her cousin, besides pretty trifles from her little brothers. In the midst of arrangements and re-arrangements

the servant entered with a large bunch of lilies from the village school-children and the announcement that Mr and Mrs Savage were just arrived with their six daughters.

Gradually the guests assembled; young and old, pretty and plain; all alike seemingly bent on enjoying themselves; some with gifts, and all with cordial greetings for Mary, for she was a general favourite. There was slim Rosanna Hunt, her scarf arranged with artful negligence to hide a slight protrusion of one shoulder; and sweet Magdalen Ellis, habited as usual in quiet colours. Then came Jane and Alice Deverell, twins so much alike that few besides their parents knew them apart with any certainty; and their fair brother Alexis, who, had he been a girl, would have increased the con-

fusion. There was little Ellen Potter, with a round rosy face like an apple, looking as natural and good-humoured as if, instead of a grand French governess, she had had her own parents with her like most of the other children; and then came three rather haughty-looking Miss Stantons; and pale Hannah Lindley the orphan; and Harriet Eyre, a thought too showy in her dress.

Mary, all life and spirits, hastened to introduce the new-comers to Maude; who, perfectly unembarrassed, bowed and uttered little speeches with the manner of a practical woman of the world; while the genuine, unobtrusive courtesy of Agnes did more towards making their guests comfortable than the eager good nature of her sister, or the correct breeding of her cousin.

At length the preliminaries were all accomplished, every one having found a seat, or being otherwise satisfactorily disposed of. The elders of the party were grouped here and there, talking and looking on; the very small children were accommodated in the adjoining apartment with a gigantic Noah's Ark: and the rest of the young people being at liberty to amuse themselves as fancy might prompt, a general appeal was made to Miss Foster for some game, novel, entertaining, and ingenious; or, some of the more diffident hinted, easy.

"I really know nothing new," said Maude; "you must have played at 'Proverbs,' 'What's my thought like,' 'How do you like it,' and 'Magic music':—or stay, there is one thing we can try—'*Bouts-rimés.*'"

"What?" asked Mary.

"'*Bouts-rimés*': it is very easy. Some one gives rhymes—mamma can do that—and then all of us fill them up as we think fit. A sonnet is the best form to select; but, if you wish, we could try eight, or even four lines."

"But I am certain I could not make a couplet," said Mary, laughing. "Of course you would get on capitally, and Agnes might manage very well, and Magdalen can do anything; but it is quite beyond me: do pray think of something more suitable to my capacity."

"Indeed I have nothing else to propose. This is very much better than mere common games; but if you will not try it, that ends the matter;" and Maude leaned back in her chair.

"I hope——" began Mary; but Agnes interposed:

"Suppose some of us attempt '*Bouts-rimés*'; and you meanwhile can settle what we shall do afterwards. Who is ready to test her poetic powers?—What, no one? Oh, Magdalen, pray join Maude and me."

This proposal met with universal approbation, and the three girls retreated to a side-table, Mary, who supplied the rhymes, exacting a promise that only one sonnet should be composed. Before the next game was fixed upon, the three following productions were submitted for judgment to the discerning public. The first was by Agnes:

Would that I were a turnip white,
Or raven black,
Or miserable hack
Dragging a cab from left to right;
Or would I were the showman of a sight,

Or weary donkey with a laden back,
Or racer in a sack,
Or freezing traveller on an Alpine height;
Or would I were straw-catching as I drown,
(A wretched landsman I who cannot swim),
Or watching a lone vessel sink,
Rather than writing; I would change my pink
Gauze for a hideous yellow satin gown,
With deep-cut scolloped edges and a rim.

"Indeed, I had no idea of the sacrifice you were making," observed Maude. "You did it with such heroic equanimity. Might I, however, venture to hint that my sympathy with your sorrows would have been greater had they been expressed in metre."

"There's gratitude for you," cried Agnes gaily; "what have you to expect, Magdalen?" and she went on to read her friend's sonnet:

I fancy the good fairies dressed in white,
Glancing like moon-beams through the shadows black;
Without much work to do for king or hack.
Training perhaps some twisted branch aright;
Or sweeping faded Autumn leaves from sight
To foster embryo life; or binding back
Stray tendrils; or in ample bean-pod sack
Bringing wild honey from the rocky height;
Or fishing for a fly lest it should drown;
Or teaching water-lily heads to swim,
Fearful that sudden rain might make them sink;
Or, dyeing the pale rose a warmer pink;
Or wrapping lilies in their leafy gown,
Yet letting the white peep beyond the rim.

"Well, Maude?"

"Well, Agnes; Miss Ellis is too kind to feel gratified at hearing that her verses make me tremble

for my own: but such as they are, listen:

Some ladies dress in muslin full and white,
Some gentlemen in cloth succinct and black;
Some patronise a dog-cart, some a hack,
Some think a painted clarence only right.
Youth is not always such a pleasing sight:
Witness a man with tassels on his back;
Or woman in a great-coat like a sack
Towering above her sex with horrid height.
If all the world were water fit to drown
There are some whom you would not teach to swim;
Rather enjoying if you saw them sink;
Certain old ladies dressed in girlish pink,
With roses and geraniums on their gown:
Go to the Bason, poke them o'er the rim."

"What a very odd sonnet," said

Mary after a slight pause; "but surely men don't wear tassels."

Her cousin smiled. "You must allow for poetical licence; and I have literally seen a man in Regent Street wearing a sort of hooded cloak with one tassel. Of course everyone will understand the Bason to mean the one in St James' Park."

"With these explanations your sonnet is comprehensible," said Mary; and Magdalen added with unaffected pleasure: "And without them it was by far the best of the three."

Maude now exerted herself to amuse the party; and soon proved that ability was not lacking. Game after game was proposed and played at; and her fun seemed inexhaustible, for nothing was thought too nonsensical or too noisy for the occasion. Her good humour and

animation were infectious: Miss Stanton incurred forfeits with the blandest smile; Hannah Lindley blushed and dimpled as she had not done for many months; Rosanna never perceived the derangement of her scarf; little Ellen exulted in freedom from schoolroom trammels; the twins guessed each other's thoughts with marvellous facility; Magdalen laughed aloud; and even Harriet Eyre's dress looked scarcely too gay for such an entertainment. Well was it for Mrs Clifton that the strawberries, cream, and tarts had been supplied with no niggard hand: and very meagre was the remnant left when the party broke up at a late hour.

III

AGNES and Mary were discussing the pleasures of the preceding evening as they sat over the unusually late breakfast, when Maude joined them. Salutations being exchanged and refreshments supplied to the last comer, the conversation was renewed.

"Who did you think was the prettiest girl in the room last night? our charming selves, of course, excepted," asked Mary; "Agnes and I cannot agree on this point."

"Yes," said her sister; "we quite agree as to mere prettiness; only I maintain that Magdalen is infinitely more attractive than half the handsome people one sees. There is so much sense in her

face, and such sweetness. Besides, her eyes are really beautiful."

"Miss Ellis has a characteristic countenance; but she appeared to me very far from the belle of the evening. Rosanna Hunt has much more regular features."

"Surely you don't think Rosanna prettier than Jane and Alice," interrupted Mary; "I suppose I never look at those two without fresh pleasure."

"They have good fair complexions, eyes, and hair, certainly," and Maude glanced rather pointedly at her unconscious cousin; "but to me they have a wax-dollish air which is quite unpleasant. I think one of the handsomest faces in the room was Miss Stanton's."

"But she has such a disagreeable expression," rejoined Mary hastily: then colouring, she half-turned to-

wards her sister, who looked grave, but did not speak.

A pause ensued; and then Agnes said, "I remember how prejudiced I felt against Miss Stanton when first she came to live here, for her appearance and manners are certainly unattractive: and how ashamed of myself I was when we heard that last year, through all the bitterly cold weather, she rose at six, though she never has a fire in her room, that she might have time before breakfast to make clothes for some of the poorest people in the village. And in the spring, when the scarlet fever was about, her mother would not let her go near the sick children for fear of contagion; so she saved up all her pocket money to buy wine and soup and such things for them as they recovered."

"I dare say she is very good," said Maude; "but that does not make her pleasing. Besides, the whole family have that disagreeable expression, and I suppose they are not all paragons. But you have both finished breakfast, and make me ashamed by your diligence. What is that beautiful piece of work?"

The sisters looked delighted: "I am so glad you like it, dear Maude. Mary and I are embroidering a cover for the lectern in our church; but we feared you might think the ground dull."

"Not at all; I prefer those quiet shades. Why, how well you do it: is it not very difficult? Let me see if I understand the devices. There is the Cross and the Crown of Thorns; and those must be the keys of St Peter, with, of course, the sword of St Paul. Do the flowers mean anything?"

"I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley," answered Agnes, pointing. "That is the Balm of Gilead—at least, it is what we will call so; there are myrrh and hyssop, and that is a palm-branch. The border is to be vine-leaves and grapes; with fig-leaves at the corners, thanks to Mary's suggestions. Would you like to help us? There is plenty of room at the frame."

"No; I should not do it well enough, and have no time to learn, as we go home to-morrow. How I envy you," she continued in a low voice, as if speaking rather to herself than to her hearers: "you who live in the country, and are exactly what you appear, and never wish for what you do not possess. I am sick of display, and poetry, and acting."

"You do not act," replied Agnes,

warmly. "I never knew a more sincere person. One difference between us is that you are less healthy and far more clever than I am. And this reminds me: Miss Savage begged me to ask you for some verses to put in her album. Would you be so very obliging? Any that you have by you would do."

"She can have the sonnet I wrote last night."

Agnes hesitated: "I could not well offer her that, because——"

"Why? she does not 'tower.' Oh! I suppose she has some reprehensible old lady in her family, and so might feel hurt at my lynch-law."

PART SECOND

I

RATHER more than a year had elapsed since Maude parted from her cousins; and now she was expecting their arrival in London every minute: for Mrs Clifton, unable to leave her young family, had gratefully availed herself of Mrs Foster's offer to receive Agnes and Mary during the early winter months, that they might take music and dancing lessons with their cousin.

At length the rumbling of an approaching cab was heard; then a loud knock and ring. Maude started up: but instead of running out to meet her guests, began poking vigorously at the fire, which soon sent a warm, cheerful light

through the apartment, enabling her, when they entered, to discern that Agnes had a more womanly air than at their last meeting, that Mary had outgrown her sister, and that both were remarkably good-looking.

"First let me show you your room; and then we can settle comfortably to tea; we are not to wait for mamma. She thought you would not mind sleeping together, as our house is so small; and I have done my best to arrange things to your taste, for I know of old you have only one taste between you. Look, my room is next yours, so we can help each other very cosily: only pray don't think of unpacking now; there will be plenty of time this evening, and you must be famished: come."

But Agnes lingered still, eager to thank her cousin for the good-

natured forethought which had robbed her own apartment of flower-vases and inkstand for the accommodation of her guests. The calls of Mary's appetite were however imperious; and very soon the sisters were snugly settled on a sofa by the fire, while Maude, in a neighbouring arm-chair, made tea.

"How long it seems since my birthday party," said Mary, as soon as the eatables had in some measure restored her social powers. "Why, Maude, you are grown quite a woman; but you look more delicate than ever, and very thin: do you still write verses?" Then without waiting for a reply: "Those which you gave Miss Savage for her album were very much admired; and Magdalen Ellis wished at the time for an autograph copy, only she had not courage to trouble you. But perhaps you are not

aware that poor Magdalen has done with albums and such like, at least for the present: she has entered on her noviciate in the Sisterhood of Mercy established near our house."

"Why poor?" said Maude. "I think she is very happy."

"Surely you would not like such a life," rejoined her cousin. "They have not proper clothes on their beds, and never go out without a thick veil, which must half-blind them. All day long they are at prayers, or teaching children, or attending the sick, or making things for the poor, or something. Is that to your taste?"

Maude half-sighed; and then answered: "You cannot imagine me either fit or inclined for such a life; still I can perceive that those who are so are very happy. When I was preparing for con-

firmation, Mr Paulson offered me a district; but I did not like the trouble, and mamma thought me too unwell to be regular. I have regretted it since, though: yet I don't fancy I ever could have talked to the poor people or have done the slightest good. Yes, I continue to write now and then as the humour seizes me; and if Miss Ellis——"

"Sister Magdalen," whispered Agnes.

"If Sister Magdalen will accept it, I will try and find her something admissible even within convent walls. But let us change the subject. On Thursday we are engaged to tea at Mrs Strawdy's. There will be no sort of party, so we need not dress or take any trouble."

"Will my Aunt go with us?" asked Agnes.

"No. Poor mamma has been ailing for some time, and is by no means strong; so, as Mrs Strawdy is an old schoolfellow of hers, and a most estimable person, she thinks herself justified in consigning you to my guardianship. On Saturday we must go shopping, as Aunt Letty says you are to get your winter things in London; and I can get mine at the same time. On Sunday—or does either of you dislike Cathedral services?"

Agnes declared they were her delight; and Mary, who had never attended any, expressed great pleasure at the prospect of hearing what her sister preferred to all secular music.

"Very well," continued Maude: "we will go to St Andrew's then, and you shall be introduced to a perfect service; or, at any rate, to perhaps the nearest English

approach to vocal perfection. But you know you are to be quite at home here; so we have not arranged any particular plans of amusement, but mean to treat you like ourselves. And now it is high time for you to retire."

II

WHEN Thursday arrived Agnes and Mary were indisposed with colds; so Mrs Foster insisted that her daughter should make their excuses to Mrs Strawdy. In a dismal frame of mind, Maude, assisted by her sympathising cousins, performed her slight preliminary toilet.

"You have no notion of the utter dreariness of this kind of invitation. I counted on your helping me through the evening, and now you fail me. Thank you, Mary; I shall not waste *eau de Cologne* on my handkerchief. Good-night both: mind you go to bed early, and get up quite well to-morrow. Good-night."

The weather was foggy and raw

as Maude stepped into the street; and proved anything but soothing to a temper already fretted; so by the time that she had arrived at her destination, removed her walking things, saluted her hostess, and apologised for her cousins, her countenance had assumed an expression neither pleased nor pleasing.

"Let me present my nieces to you, my dear," said Mrs Strawdy, taking her young friend by the hand and leading her towards the fire: "This is Miss Mowbray, or, as you must call her, Annie; that is Caroline, and that Sophy. They have heard so much of you, that any further introduction is needless;" here Maude bowed rather stiffly: "but, as we are early people, you will excuse our commencing with tea, after which we shall have leisure for amusement."

There was something so genuinely kind and simple in Mrs Strawdy's manner, that even Maude felt mollified, and resolved on doing her best not only towards suppressing all appearance of yawns, but also towards bearing her part in the conversation.

"My cousins will regret their indisposition more than ever, when they learn of how much pleasure it has deprived them," said she, civilly addressing Miss Mowbray.

A polite bend, smile, and murmur formed the sole response; and once more a subject had to be started.

"Have you been very gay lately? I begin to acquire the reputation of an invalid; and so my privacy is respected."

Annie coloured and looked excessively embarrassed; at last she answered in a low hesitating voice:

"We go out extremely little, partly because we never dance."

"Nor I either; it really is too fatiguing: yet a ball-room is no bad place for a mere spectator. Perhaps, though, you prefer the Theatre?"

"We never go to the play," rejoined Miss Mowbray, looking more and more uncomfortable.

Maude ran on: "Oh, I beg your pardon, you do not approve of such entertainments. I never go, but only for want of someone to take me." Then addressing Mrs Strawdy: "I think you know my aunt, Mrs Clifton?"

"I visited her years ago with your mamma," was the answer: "when you were quite a little child. I hope she continues in good health. Pray remember me to her and to Mr Clifton when you write."

"With pleasure. She has a large family now, eight children."

"That is indeed a large family," rejoined Mrs Strawdy, intent meanwhile on dissecting a cake with mathematical precision: "you must try a piece, it is Sophy's own manufacture."

Despairing of success in this quarter, Maude now directed her attention to Caroline, whose voice she had not heard once in the course of the evening.

"I hope you will favour us with some music after tea; in fact, I can take no denial. You look too blooming to plead a cold, and I feel certain you will not refuse to indulge my love for sweet sounds: of your ability to do so I have heard elsewhere."

"I shall be most happy; only you must favour us in return."

"I will do my best," answered

Maude, somewhat encouraged; "but my own performances are very poor. Are you fond of German songs? they form my chief resource."

"Yes, I like them much."

Baffled in this quarter also, Miss Foster wanted courage to attack Sophy, whose countenance promised more cake than conversation. The meal seemed endless: she fidgeted under the table with her fingers; pushed about a stool on the noiselessly-soft carpet until it came in contact with some one's foot; and at last fairly deprived Caroline of her third cup of coffee, by opening the piano and claiming the fulfilment of her promise.

The young lady complied with obliging readiness. She sang some simple airs, mostly religious; not indeed with much expression, but in a voice clear and warbling as a

bird's. Maude felt consoled for all the contrarieties of the day; and was bargaining for one more song before taking Caroline's place at the instrument, when the door opened to admit Mrs and Miss Savage; who having only just reached town, and hearing from Mrs Foster that her daughter was at the house of a mutual friend, resolved on begging the hospitality of Mrs Strawdy, and renewing their acquaintance.

Poor Maude's misfortunes now came thick and fast. Seated between Miss Savage and Sophia Mowbray, she was attacked on either hand with questions concerning her verses. In the first place, did she continue to write? Yes. A flood of ecstatic compliments followed this admission: she was so young, so much admired, and, poor thing, looked so delicate.

It was quite affecting to think of her lying awake at night meditating those sweet verses—("I sleep like a top," Maude put in, drily)—which so delighted her friends, and would so charm the public if only Miss Foster could be induced to publish. At last the bystanders were called upon to intercede for a recitation.

Maude coloured with displeasure; a hasty answer was rising to her lips, when the absurdity of her position flashed across her mind so forcibly that, almost unable to check a laugh in the midst of her annoyance, she put her handkerchief to her mouth. Miss Savage, impressed with a notion that her request was about to be complied with, raised her hand, imploring silence; and settled herself in a listening attitude.

"You will excuse me," Maude at

last said very coldly; "I could not think of monopolising every one's attention. Indeed you are extremely good, but you must excuse me." And here Mrs Savage interposed, desiring her daughter not to tease Miss Foster; and Mrs Strawdy seconded her friend's arguments by a hint that supper would make its appearance in a few minutes.

Finally the maid announced that Miss Foster was "fetched"; and Maude, shortening her adieus and turning a deaf ear to Annie's suggestions that their acquaintance should not terminate with the first meeting, returned home dissatisfied with her circumstances, her friends, and herself.

III

IT was Christmas Eve. All day long Maude and her cousins were hard at work putting up holly and mistletoe in wreaths, festoons, or bunches, wherever the arrangement of the rooms admitted of such embellishment. The picture-frames were hidden behind foliage and bright berries; the bird-cages were stuck as full of green as though it had been Summer. A fine sprig of holly was set apart as a centre-bit for the pudding of next day: scratched hands and injured gowns were disregarded: hour after hour the noisy bustle raged: until Mrs Foster, hunted from place to place by her young relatives, heard, with

inward satisfaction, that the decorations were completed.

After tea Mary set the backgammon board in array and challenged her aunt to their customary evening game: Maude, complaining of a headache, and promising either to wrap herself in a warm shawl or to go to bed, went to her room; and Agnes, listening to the rattle of the dice, at last came to the conclusion that her presence was not needed downstairs, and resolved to visit the upper regions. Thinking that her cousin was lying down tired and might have fallen asleep, she forbore knocking; but opened the door softly and peeped in.

Maude was seated at a table, surrounded by the old chaos of stationery; before her lay the locking manuscript-book, into which she had just copied something.

That day she had appeared more than usually animated: and now supporting her forehead upon her hand, her eyes cast down till the long lashes nearly rested upon her cheeks, she looked pale, languid, almost in pain. She did not move, but let her visitor come close to her without speaking. Agnes thought she was crying.

"Dear Maude, you have overtired yourself. Indeed, for all our sakes, you should be more careful:" here Agnes passed her arm affectionately round her friend's neck: "I hoped to find you fast asleep, and instead of this you have been writing in the cold."

"You will stay to Communion to-morrow?" asked Maude after a short silence, and without replying to her cousin's remarks; even these few words seemed to cost her an effort.

"Of course I shall; why, it is Christmas Day: at least I trust to do so. Mary and I have been thinking how nice it will be for us all to receive together: so I want you to promise that you will pray for us at the Altar, as I shall for you. Will you?"

"I shall not receive to-morrow," answered Maude; then hurrying on as if to prevent the other from remonstrating: "No: at least I will not profane Holy Things; I will not add this to all the rest. I have gone over and over again, thinking I should come right in time, and I do not come right. I will go no more."

Agnes turned quite pale: "Stop," she said, interrupting her cousin: "stop; you cannot mean—you do not know what you are saying. You will go no more? Only think if the struggle is so hard now, what

it will be when you reject all help."

"I do not struggle."

"You are ill to-night," rejoined Agnes very gently; "you are tired and over-excited. Take my advice, dear; say your prayers and get to bed. But do not be very long; if there is anything you miss and will tell me of, I will say it in your stead. Don't think me unfeeling: I was once on the very point of acting as you propose. I was perfectly wretched: harassed and discouraged on all sides. But then it struck me—you won't be angry? —that it was so ungrateful to follow my own fancies, instead of at least endeavouring to do God's Will: and so foolish too; for if our safety is not in obedience, where is it?"

Maude shook her head: "Your case is different. Whatever your

faults may be (not that I perceive any), you are trying to correct them; your own conscience tells you that. But I am not trying. No one will say that I cannot avoid putting myself forward and displaying my verses. Agnes, you must admit so much."

Deep-rooted indeed was that vanity which made Maude take pleasure, on such an occasion, in proving the force of arguments directed against herself. Still Agnes would not yield; but resolutely did battle for the truth.

"If hitherto it has been so, let it be so no more. It is not too late; besides, think for one moment what will be the end of this. We must all die: what if you keep to your resolution, and do as you have said, and receive the Blessed Sacrament no more?" —Her eyes filled with tears.

Maude's answer came in a subdued tone: "I do not mean never to communicate again. You remember Mr Paulson told us last Sunday that sickness and suffering are sent for our correction. I suffer very much. Perhaps a time will come when these will have done their work on me also; when I shall be purified indeed and weaned from the world. Who knows? the lost have been found, the dead quickened." She paused as if in thought; then continued: "You partake of the Blessed Sacrament in peace, Agnes, for you are good; and Mary, for she is harmless: but your conduct cannot serve to direct mine, because I am neither the one nor the other. Some day I may be fit again to approach the Holy Altar, but till then I will at least refrain from dishonouring it."

Agnes felt almost indignant.

"Maude, how can you talk so? this is not reverence. You cannot mean that for the present you will indulge vanity and display; that you will court admiration and applause; that you will take your fill of pleasure until sickness, or it may be death, strips you of temptation and sin together. Forgive me; I am sure you never meant this: yet what else does a deliberate resolution to put off doing right come to?—and if you are determined at once to do your best, why deprive yourself of the appointed means of grace? Dear Maude, think better of it;" and Agnes knelt beside her cousin, and laid her head against her bosom.

But still Maude, with a sort of desperate wilfulness, kept saying: "It is of no use; I cannot go to-morrow; it is of no use." She hid her face, leaning upon the

table and weeping bitterly; while Agnes, almost discouraged, quitted the room.

Maude, once more alone, sat for some time just as her cousin left her. Gradually the thick, low sobs became more rare; she was beginning to feel sleepy. At last she roused herself with an effort, and commenced undressing; then it struck her that her prayers had still to be said. The idea of beginning them frightened her, yet she could not settle to sleep without saying something. Strange prayers they must have been, offered with a divided heart and a reproachful conscience. Still they were said at length; and Maude lay down harassed, wretched, remorseful, everything but penitent. She was nearly asleep, nearly unconscious of her troubles, when the first stroke of midnight sounded.

PART THIRD

I

Agnes Clifton to Maude Foster.

12*th June* 18—

My dear Maude,

MAMMA has written to my aunt that Mary's marriage is fixed for the 4th of next month: but as I fear we cannot expect you both so many days before the time, I also write, hoping that you at least will come without delay. At any rate, I shall be at the station to-morrow afternoon with a chaise for your luggage, so pray take pity on my desolate condition, and avail yourself of the three o'clock train. As we are both bridesmaids-elect, I thought it

would be very nice for us to be dressed alike, so have procured double quantity of everything; thus you will perceive no pretence remains for your lingering in smoky London.

You will be amused when you see Mary: I have already lost my companion. Mr Herbert calls at least once a day, but sometimes oftener; so all day long Mary is on the alert. She takes much more interest in the roses over the porch than was formerly the case; the creepers outside the windows require continual training, not to say hourly care: I tell her the constitution of the garden must have become seriously weakened lately. One morning I caught her before the glass, trying the effect of syringa (the English orange-blossom, you know) in her hair. She looked such a darling.

I hinted how flattered Mr Herbert would feel when I told him; which provoked her to offer a few remarks on old maids. Was it not a shame?

Last Thursday Magdalen Ellis was finally received into the Sisterhood of Mercy. I wished much to be present, but could not, as the whole affair was conducted quite privately; only her parents were admitted. However, I made interest for a lock of her beautiful hair, which I prize highly. It makes me sad to look at it; yet I know she has chosen well; and will, if she perseveres, receive hereafter an abundant recompense for all she has forgone here. Sometimes I think whether such a life can be suited to me; but then I could not leave mamma: indeed, that is just what Magdalen felt so much. I met her yesterday

walking with some poor children. Her veil was down, nearly hiding her face; still I fancy she looked thoughtful, but very calm and happy. She says she always prays for me, and asked my prayers; so I begged her to remember you and Mary. Then she inquired how you are; desiring her kindest love to you, and assuring me she makes no doubt your name will be known at some future period: but checking herself almost immediately, she added that she could fancy you very different, as pale Sister Maude. This surprised me; I can fancy nothing of the sort. Then, having nearly reached my home, we parted.

What a document I have composed; I who have not one minute to spare from Mary's trousseau. Will you give my love to my aunt; and request her from me

to permit your immediately coming to your affectionate cousin,

AGNES M. CLIFTON.

P.S. — Mary would doubtless send a message were she in the room; I conjecture her to be lurking about somewhere on the watch. Good-bye: or rather, Come.

Maude handed the letter to her mother. "Can you spare me, mamma? I should like to go, but not if it is to inconvenience you."

"Certainly you shall go, my dear. It is a real pleasure to hear you express interest on some point, and you cannot be with anyone I approve of more than Agnes. But you must make haste with the packing now. I will come and help you in a few minutes."

Still Maude lingered. "Did you see about Magdalen? I wonder what made her think of

me as a Sister. It is very nice of her; but then she is so good she never can conceive what I am like. Mamma, should you mind my being a nun?"

"Yes, my dear; it would make me miserable. But for the present take my advice and hurry a little, or the train will leave without you."

Thus urged, Maude proceeded to bundle various miscellaneous goods into a trunk; the only article on the safety of which she bestowed much thought being the present destined for Mary: a sofa-pillow worked in glowing shades of wool and silk. This she wrapped carefully in a cloth, and laid at the bottom: then over it all else was heaped without much ceremony. Many were the delays occasioned by things mislaid, which must be looked for; ill-secured,

which must be re-arranged; or remembered too late, which yet could not be dispensed with, and so must be crammed in somewhere. At length, however, the tardy preparations were completed; and Maude, enveloped in two shawls, though it was the height of summer, stepped into a cab; promising strict conformity to her mother's injunction that both the windows should be kept closed.

Half-an-hour had not elapsed when another cab drove up to the door; and out of it Maude was lifted perfectly insensible. She had been overturned; and, though no limb was broken, had neither stirred nor spoken since the accident.

II

Maude Foster to Agnes Clifton.

2nd July 18—

My dear Agnes,

YOU have heard of my mishap? it keeps me not bed-ridden, but sofa-ridden. My side is dreadfully hurt; I looked at it this morning for the first time, but hope never again to see so shocking a sight. The pain now and then is extreme; though not always so; sometimes, in fact, I am unconscious of any injury.

Will you convey my best love and wishes to Mary, and tell her how much I regret being away from her at such a time, especially as mamma will not hear of leaving me.

The surgeon comes twice a day to dress my wounds; still, all the burden of nursing falls on poor mamma. How I wish you were here to help us both; we should find plenty to say.

But, perhaps, ere many months are past I shall be up and about, when we may go together on a visit to Mary; a most delightful possibility. By the way, how I should love a baby of hers, and what a pretty little creature it ought to be. Do you think Mr Herbert handsome? hitherto I have only had a partial opinion.

Ugh, my side! it gives an awful twinge now and then. You need not read my letter; but I must write it, for I am unable to do anything else. Did the pillow reach safely? It gave me so much pleasure to work it for Mary, who, I hope, likes it. At all events,

if not to her taste, she may console herself with the reflection that it is unique; for the pattern was my own designing.

Here comes dinner; good-bye. When will anything so welcome as your kind face gladden the eyes of your affectionate

MAUDE FOSTER?

P.S.—I have turned tippler lately on port wine three times a day. "To keep you up," says my doctor: while I obstinately refuse to be kept up, but insist on becoming weaker and weaker. Mind you write me a full history of your grand doings on a certain occasion: not omitting a detailed account of the lovely bride, her appearance, deportment, and toilet. Good-bye once more: when shall I see you all again?

III

THREE weeks had passed away. A burning sun seemed baking the very dust in the streets, and sucking the last remnant of moisture from the straw spread in front of Mrs Foster's house, when the sound of a low muffled ring was heard in the sick-room; and Maude, now entirely confined to her bed, raising herself on one arm, looked eagerly towards the door; which opened to admit a servant with the welcome announcement that Agnes had arrived.

After tea Mrs Foster, almost worn out with fatigue, went to bed, leaving her daughter under the care of their guest. The first greetings between the cousins had passed sadly enough. Agnes per-

ceived at a glance that Maude was, as her last letter hinted, in a most alarming state; while the sick girl, well aware of her condition, received her friend with an emotion which showed she felt it might be for the last time. But soon her spirits rallied.

"I shall enjoy our evening together so much, Agnes," said she, speaking now quite cheerfully. "You must tell me all the news. Have you heard from Mary since your last despatch to me?"

"Mamma received a letter this morning before I set off; and she sent it, hoping to amuse you. Shall I read it aloud?"

"No; let me have it myself." Her eye travelled rapidly down the well-filled pages, comprehending at a glance all the tale of happiness. Mr and Mrs Herbert were at

Scarborough; they would thence proceed to the Lakes; and thence, most probably, homewards, though a prolonged tour was mentioned as just possible. But both plans seemed alike pleasing to Mary; for she was full of her husband, and both were equally connected with him.

Maude smiled as paragraph after paragraph enlarged on the same topic. At last she said: "Agnes, if you could not be yourself, but must become one of us three: I don't mean as to goodness, of course, but merely as regards circumstances, would you change with Sister Magdalen, with Mary, or with me?"

"Not with Mary, certainly. Neither should I have courage to change with you; I never should bear pain so well: nor yet with Sister Magdalen; for I want her

fervour of devotion. So at present I fear you must even put up with me as I am. Will that do?"

There was a pause. A fresh wind had sprung up, and the sun was setting.

At length Maude resumed: "Do you recollect last Christmas Eve when I was so wretched, what shocking things I said? How I rejoice that my next Communion was not indeed delayed till sickness had stripped me of temptation and sin together."

"Did I say that? It was very harsh."

"Not harsh: it was just and right as far as it went; only something more was required. But I never told you what altered me. The truth is, for a time I avoided as much as possible frequenting our parish church, for fear of

remarks. Mamma, knowing how I love St Andrew's, let me go there very often by myself, because the walk is too long for her. I wanted resolution to do right; yet, believe me, I was very miserable; how I could say my prayers at that period is a mystery. So matters went on; till one day as I was returning from a shop, I met Mr Paulson. He enquired immediately whether I had been staying in the country. Of course I answered, No. Had I been ill? again, No. Then gradually the whole story came out. I never shall forget the shame of my admissions; each word seemed forced from me, yet at last, all was told. I will not repeat all we said then, and on a subsequent occasion when he saw me at church: the end was, that I partook of the Holy Communion on

Easter Day. That was indeed a Feast."

Then changing the conversation abruptly, Maude said: "Agnes, it would only pain mamma to look over everything if I die; will you examine my verses and destroy what I evidently never intended to be seen. They might all be thrown away together, only mamma is so fond of them. What will she do?"—and the poor girl hid her face in the pillows.

"But is there no hope, then?"

"Not the slightest, if you mean of recovery; and she does not know it. Don't go away when all's over, but do what you can to comfort her. I have been her misery from my birth till now; there is no time to do better, but you must leave me, please; for I feel completely exhausted. Or, stay one moment. I saw Mr Paulson again this morn-

ing, and he promised to come to-morrow to administer the Blessed Sacrament to me; so I count on you and mamma receiving with me, for the last time perhaps: will you?"

"Yes, dear Maude. But you are so young, don't give up hope. And now would you like me to remain here during the night? I can establish myself quite comfortably on your sofa."

"Thank you, but it could only make me restless. Good-night, my own dear Agnes."

"Good-night, dear Maude. I trust to rise early to-morrow, that I may be with you all the sooner." So they parted.

That morrow never dawned for Maude Foster.

. . . . . .

Agnes proceeded to perform

the task imposed upon her, with scrupulous anxiety to carry out her friend's wishes. The locked book she never opened; but had it placed in Maude's coffin, with all its words of folly, sin, vanity; and, she humbly trusted, of true penitence also. She next collected the scraps of paper found in her cousin's desk and portfolio, or lying loose upon the table; and proceeded to examine them. Many of these were mere fragments, many half-effaced pencil scrawls, some written on torn backs of letters, and some full of incomprehensible abbreviations. Agnes was astonished at the variety of Maude's compositions. Piece after piece she committed to the flames, fearful lest any should be preserved not intended for general perusal: but it cost her a pang to do so; and to see how small a number remained for Mrs Foster.

Of two only she took copies for herself.

The first was evidently composed subsequently to Maude's accident:

Fade, tender lily,
  Fade, O crimson rose,
Fade every flower,
  Sweetest flower that blows.

Go, chilly Autumn,
  Come, O Winter cold;
Let the green stalks die away
  Into common mould.

Birth follows hard on death,
  Life on withering.
Hasten, we shall come the sooner
  Back to pleasant Spring.

The other was a sonnet, dated the morning before her death:

What is it Jesus saith unto the soul?
"Take up the Cross, and come, and follow Me."
This word He saith to all; no man may be

Without the Cross, wishing to win the goal.
Then take it bravely up, setting thy whole
Body to bear; it will not weigh on thee
Beyond thy utmost strength: take it; for He
Knoweth when thou art weak, and will control
The powers of darkness that thou need'st not fear.
He will be with thee, helping, strengthening,
Until it is enough: for lo, the day
Cometh when He shall call thee: thou shalt hear
His Voice that says: "Winter is past, and Spring
Is come; arise, My Love, and come away."

Agnes cut one long tress from Maude's head; and on her return home laid it in the same paper with the lock of Magdalen's hair. These she treasured greatly, and, gazing on them, would long and pray for the hastening of that

eternal morning which shall re-unite in God those who in Him, or for His sake, have parted here.

Amen for us all.

THE END.

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